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Perseverance: an Indispensable Value for Man's Success in the Light of Lk. 9:62 (Pp. 119-130)

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Abstract

As a clergy in the missionary field, who has been interacting with people, coupled with the experiences gathered in the institutions of higher learning, it has been observed that many people who are facing many difficult challenges in life, most often despair and surrender. Many people do not know that if they fail in one area, they can still succeed in another. What it means therefore is that one is expected to know one's target, and do everything within one's power to hit that target. It is to this effect that Jesus, referring to the kingdom of God as a necessary target, emphatically affirmed that, who ever puts his hands on the plough and looks back, is not fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62). The purpose of this write up therefore is to awaken people's consciousness on the importance of perseverance in man's quest for success in life and to urge people to persevere in their struggle for survival. To verify the possibility of hitting ones target through perseverance, the researcher, examined the difficulties experienced by Abraham Lincoln during his journey to the presidential seat of America and Helen killer's achievements in life in spite of her deformities. It was observed that duo were able to succeed because of their perseverance and tenacity towards the achievement of their set target. The conclusion therefore is that those who have persevered in the pursuit of their set target most often succeeded. It is therefore recommended that everyone should be able to identify ones set target and go for it. Furthermore, people should stop losing hope in the face of difficulties rather, one should get convinced that perseverance and tenacity can give victory to all.

Introduction

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus stressed the importance of being constant and consistent in the struggle to achieve something in life. (Lk. 9:62). Coincidentally, perseverance happened to be one of the African cultural values. A critical observation of the trend of events in our contemporary society will lead one to questioning the people's view about this value (perseverance).

There are some sectors in life where some people seem not to understand the role of perseverance in such sectors. For instance, the spiritual life and some vital areas of man's social life like education, working for common good and the struggle to become a good citizen.

It therefore becomes necessary to remind ourselves of the importance of perseverance in all the activities of every person so as to achieve the maximum success in life.

This write up will therefore be effectively discussed under the following sub captions: the meaning of the word *man* in this discourse, the meaning of the word perseverance, perseverance as a value, the biblical demand for perseverance, perseverance in the service of man's success, the enemies of perseverance, code of persistence, conclusion and recommendations.

The Meaning of the Word 'Man' in this Discourse

Man here refers to both man and woman living on earth. As Taylor (1994:34) puts it, the word 'man' means mankind – all the races and tribes and nations of human beings in the world. But it also means individual men and women, boys and girls – the people we meet each day, the members of our church, those who live in our village or neighbourhood or town. The word man also refers to a single person, a man or a woman, 'you' or 'I', the human person. According to Martino (2005:71)

Man exists as a unique and unrepeatable being, he exists as an 'I', capable of self-understanding, self- possession and self-determination. The human person is an intelligent and conscious being, capable of reflecting on himself and therefore of being aware of himself and his actions. However, it is not intellect, consciousness and freedom that define the person, rather it is the person who is the basis of the acts of the intellect, consciousness and freedom. This act can even be absent, for even without them, man does not cease to be a person.

This implies that man is the centre of freedom and consciousness, a subjective entity with inviolable uniqueness that is comparable to those of no one else. Each person is so unrepeatable that the one remains the only 'I' in the universe. This accounts for the inadmissibility of any attempt to reduce the status of any one whether ideologically or otherwise. It also places a demand on the individual as he searches for the integral development of the self.

Perseverance

According to Lorimer and Lechner (2000:1087) "perseverance is the quality of being persistent and preserving, a continuing in a state of grace leading to a state of glory. To persevere, therefore, means "to try hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties". Perseverance includes the act of struggling in spite of all odds to hit the target. It is a dogged resolution and systematic approach to the achievement of a particular set value. It is also an indefatigable determination geared toward the accomplishment of a particular task.

Perseverance as a Value

As Lorimer and Lechner (2000:1087) puts it, "value refers to the measure of how strongly something is desired for its physical or moral beauty, usefulness, rarity etc, especially, expressed in terms of the effort, money etc, one is willing to expend in acquiring, retaining possession of, or preserving it". Value therefore refers to the degree of importance attached to something.

Those things considered as having very high values are the things that have very high importance attached to them. These include life which is referred to as primary value, property etc. The importance of value in human life is clearly explicated by Anyanwu (2009:3) where he cited Ignacimuthu as saying that

value gives direction and firmness to life and they bring to life the important dimension of meaning which adds joy, satisfaction and peace to life... they identify a person, giving him a name, a face and character. Without values, one would be floating like a piece of driftwood in the swirling waters of a river ... they bring quality to life.

There are many kinds of values. These include Religious values social values, personal values, cultural values, ethical values etc.

Perseverance is one of the personal values. Anyanwu (2009:7) rightly explained that

personal values are more or less synonymous with what we referred to earlier on as subjective values. They are needed by the individual to achieve goals and standards one sets for oneself. Personal values are thus cherished and practiced by an individual within oneself without any explicit interaction with any other person.

He gave some examples of personal values as cleanliness, contentment, creativity and determination. One who is determined to achieve a particular goal in life is always seen to be persistent, consistent, indefatigable and tenaciously resolute in the pursuit of that goal. The resultant effect is success.

The Biblical Demand for Perseverance

In Luke's Gospel (Lk 9: 62), some people who wanted to follow Jesus Christ began to give excuses, Jesus seized the opportunity to educate the people on hardship of the apostolic calling. In clear terms, he emphatically affirmed that "once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God." (Luke. 9: 62). The picture of the ploughman in this verse of Luke's gospel shows the degree of carefulness, meticulous attention and tenacity demanded of a true follower of Jesus Christ. The ploughman must not look back if he desires to keep a straight furrow. Jesus wishes his followers to persevere in their journey to eternity.

Perseverance is what Jesus has reiterated in many parts of the scripture. For instance, he asserted that at the end time, many false prophets will arise, they will deceive many, and with the increase of lawlessness, love in most men will grow cold but the man who stands firm to the end will be saved (Matt. 24:11-13). What it means therefore is that the salvation of any person will depend on the person's ability to persevere in doing good and avoiding evil till the end of the person's life on earth.

Furthermore, Jesus emphasized the importance of persistence in prayer when he narrated the story of the importunate friend who had a visitor and went to his friend at midnight to ask for bread. He said, "I tell you, if the man does not get up and give him for friendship's sake, persistence will be enough to make him get up and give his friend all he wants" (Lk. 11:18).

The same was the case of the importunate widow and the unscrupulous judge. The judge said to himself, "maybe I have neither fear of God nor

respect for man, but since she keeps pestering me, I must give this widow her just rights, or she will persist in coming and worry me to death" (Lk. 18:1-5). The operative words here are pestering and persistence and these are other ways of expressing perseverance.

Jesus emphatically declared the condition for following him when He explicitly affirmed; "if anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). The gospel of Luke has it that the carrying of the cross should be every day. (Lk. 9:23). What it implies is that following Jesus Christ strongly demands seriousness, consistency and perseverance. Consequently, perseverance is one of the necessary conditions for human salvation. Invariably, experience also teaches that even outside the spiritual realm, whatever one wants to achieve or accomplish in this life, one has to pursue that ambition without looking back until it is accomplished or achieved.

Perseverance in the Service of Man's Success

Experience has proved that no man has been able to utilize all the potentialities endowed in him by nature. This accounts for the reason why some people who have no hands can conveniently use their legs to supply the services done by the hand, like, writing, eating, picking things from wherever they are kept etc. The dumb can use body language to communicate the blind go to school and learn how to read and write. In fact, the handicapped do many wonderful things which those who are not in any way handicapped cannot ordinarily do. For instance, Ofor (2005:28) in his book *Secrets of Achievers* narrated that

Helen Keller was not discouraged at all. At 18 month of age, she was diagnosed of acute congestion of the stomach and brain, which led to her blindness, deafness and dumbness. But this courageous woman grew up to face her world. She searched for a good teacher who taught her by association. Within months, Keller made remarkable impact in her learning that attracted educators worldwide. Courageous enough, the handicapped woman studied to communicate English, French and German. With this, she wrote a number of books that changed her world from a miserable handicapped to a hero of her time.

The secret behind these successes is perseverance.

Man by nature is a working being. When one aims at a target or a set –goal, the person usually strives to hit the target. And this spurs the person on to be consistent and to preserve till the set – goal is achieved. A serious minded person is never afraid of failure knowing fully well that it was through trial and error that man developed. Anyone who is afraid of failure will invariably be too afraid of facing challenges in life. Trying and failing is like striking different chords of life till one strikes the right chords, which immediately gives the right tune.

Nweze (2006:2) rightly opined that “every successful life has records of difficulties encountered, but conquered with patience and determination” This is because failure is success tantalizing us but yet to mature. For instance, Abraham Lincoln’s journey to American presidential seat as compiled by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, and cited by Ugwuanyi (2007:36-37), clearly shows what perseverance is capable of achieving.

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|------|---|
| 1817 | Abraham Lincoln’s family was forced out of their home. He had to work to Support them. |
| 1818 | His mother died |
| 1831 | He failed in business |
| 1832 | He ran for state legislature – lost. |
| 1832 | Also lost his job. Wanted to go to law school but could not get in |
| 1833 | He borrowed some money from a friend to begin a business and by the end of the year, he was bankrupt. He spent the next 17years of his life paying off this debt. |
| 1834 | He ran for state legislature again – won |
| 1835 | Was engaged to be married, sweetheart died and his heart was broken. |
| 1836 | He had a total nervous breakdown and was in bed for six months. |
| 1837 | Become partner in Springfield, IL, law practice Sought to become speaker of the state legislature – defeated. |

- 1840 He sought to be come elector – defeated
Married Mary Todd Lincoln on November 4. The couple
had four sons.
- 1843 Ran for congress – lost.
- 1846 Ran for congress again, this time he won. Went to washing
- 1847-49 Served one-two –year term in the U.S house of
Representative, then resumed law practice in the
Springfield
- 1848 Ran for re-election to congress – lost
- 1849 Sought the job of land officer in his home state – rejected.
- 1854 He ran for senate of the United States – lost
- 1856 he sought the vice presidential nomination at his party's
national convention, got less than 100 votes.
- 1858 Ran for U.S. senate again, again he lost
- 1860 He was elected president of the United States (p.36-37)

He then served as the 16th president of America from 1861-1865.

This also confirms the saying that “greatness has tales of difficulties; it is not made in a day. It is made by overcoming the problems and oppositions, waves and billows of life”. A clear cut fact is that many people give up very easily especially when they try and try and fail at each point in time. They forgot that the man who breaks through the tangled webs of difficulties on the road of life, and achieves his objectives has untied the knots tied by the gods. But the person, who has a target, is bound to persevere in the struggle toward achieving the targeted goal without looking back. This is precisely what Jesus meant when He was talking about the kingdom of God, firmly asserted that who ever lays his hand on the plough and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God (Lk.9:62). This means that if one really has the kingdom of God as one's set-goal or target, one must persistently and doggedly go in pursuit of it in order to achieve it. The implication is that in every sphere of man's life on earth, persistence is a necessary condition for achieving one's goal. Therefore, in order to help those who easily give up in the face of difficulties, a code of persistence is drawn. The essence is to

constantly remind ourselves of the need to persevere in our struggle for success in life, for since man is a being under constant formation, he needs constant information.

The Enemies of Perseverance

The veracity of Jesus' assertion that looking back once the hand is laid on the plough disqualifies one for the achievement of the goal in view is incontestable. This is because 'looking back' in this context means acting with doubt and double mindedness. It can also mean succumbing to the pressure of difficulties and hardships and the acceptance of defeat. For instance, any student who is afraid of facing the difficulties and challenges of academic work like, studying hard and attending lectures with undistracted attention may not hope to make an excellent result.

Similarly, anyone who wishes to pursue any goal in life but fails to persevere in the pursuit of the achievement of that goal may likely not succeed as much as he/she desired. Enemies of perseverance therefore include: discouragement, procrastination, laziness and lack of motivation.

Discouragement

The immediate consequence of the presence of these enemies of perseverance is discouragement. Hence Ugwuanyi (2007:41) rightly opined that

discouragement comes when we feel that our opportunity for success is gone or when we are not immediately successful in our attempts to do something or even when we lack purpose and a plan. Fear of being criticized or the presence of problems could also lead to this.

As a matter of fact, one can easily be discouraged by constant disappointment and failure.

Procrastination

Another enemy of perseverance is procrastination. Emery and Brewster (Ed) (1953:1399) in *The New Century Dictionary* stated that "the word procrastination came from two Latin words; 'pro' meaning 'forward' and 'cras' which means 'tomorrow', 'crastinus' means "of tomorrow". Procrastination therefore is the act or the habit of procrastinating, to put off till another day or time or from day to day" It is usually said that procrastination is the thief of time and one of these days is none of these days. If one wants to buy a car, and continues to postpone buying it. The

usual thing is that as one continues to procrastinate, one day, some other problems will emerge and carry away the money for buying the car.

Laziness

Closest to procrastination is laziness. This is another serious enemy of perseverance. A lazy person will always defer actions to another day or time. The scripture has very important admonition for the lazy people. "Lazy people should learn a lesson from the way ants live. They have no leader, chief or ruler, but they store up their food during the summer, getting ready for winter. How long is the lazy man going to get up? I will just take a short nap he says; I will fold my hands and rest a while". But while he sleeps, poverty will attack him like an armed robber. (Prov. 6:6-10). A lazy person will always wait for miracles to bring success. For instance, Unoka of things fall apart was anxious going to the oracle to find out why his farm was not yielding good harvest. The truth was that he was too lazy to farm well, (Achebe 1958). A lazy person has thousand reasons why activities should be postponed till another time. In fact, it is not the intention of the scripture that any one should be lazy. "Our one desire is that every one of you should go on showing the same earnestness to the end, to the perfect fulfillment of our hopes, never growing careless, but imitating those who have the faith and the perseverance to inherit the promises" (Heb. 6: 11-12).

Lack of motivation

Lack of motivation is another serious enemy of perseverance. Lack of motivation can be caused by the ignorance of the importance of the said target. For instance, truancy and the attitude of some parents toward the education of their children show the degree of their ignorance of the importance of education. The person is not motivated because he/she does not see any reason for persevering in the study.

Frustration

Lack of motivation can also be caused by frustration. One may be frustrated by the fear of failure. For instance in the political area, one who has contested for local government chairman for about twice and failed, contested for the state House of Assembly and failed might be tempted to fling his tail between his hind legs and quietly go home in despair. The conclusion often is the saying; once beaten, twice shy.

Despair

Again, a trader might fail in business for about three or more times. As a result, the person might lose every sense of motivation toward trading, becomes frustrated and decides to go back to the village and stay.

Failure in this circumstance has robbed the person of motivation to continue struggling either as a politician or a trader. In this situation, the parable of Jesus on the need to be constant in prayer and never lose heart serves as a good admonition (Lk. 18:1-8).

Code of Persistence

Ugwuanyi (2007) carefully lifted from Harold Sherman's book *How to turn failure into success* what he called the code of persistence. Anyone who gives up very easily should write out this code and recite it daily:

- I will never give up so long as I know I am right.
- I will believe that all things will work out for me if I hang on until the end.
- I will be courageous and undismayed in the face of odds.
- I will not permit anyone to intimidate me or deter me from my goals.
- I will fight to overcome all physical handicaps and setbacks.
- I will try again and again and yet again to accomplish what I desire.
- I will take new faith and resolution from the knowledge that all successful men and women had to fight and defeat an adversity
- I will never surrender to discouragement or despair no matter what seeming obstacles may confront me (p.42).

It is said that "when the going gets tough, it is the tough that gets going". So when a set goal is difficult to get at, it is only the persistent that gets at it.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the world is full of obstacles and difficulties and no success is found on a Plata of gold. One must struggle to succeed. For instance, one

must struggle to pass examinations, one must struggle to succeed in business, one must struggle to succeed in politics etc. since life is full of struggle, one must have to persist, be consistent and persevere in order to survive and succeed in life. This is also applicable to our spiritual life. Only those who persevere to the end will see God (Mt. 24:13).

The act of laying hand on the plough and looking back in Lk 9:62 is a clear sign of irresolution, otiosity and inactiveness. The implication is failure and inability to hit the target.

Finally, in the words of Winston Churchill in Castle (1992) "Never give in! Never give in! Never, never, never, never, never – in anything great or small, large or petty – never give in expect to convictions of honour and good sense." The onus is on every individual to persevere in order to succeed.

Recommendations

Everybody agrees that man's life on earth is full of ups and downs. Hardly can one find a person who has no problems. There are however people who have more problems than others. It is therefore recommended that when one is constantly confronted with difficult and complex problems, enough to divert one's attention from one's set target, rather than losing hope, the person should be patient and persistent, remembering that "it is the patient dog that eats the fattest bone."

A successful person is not one who has not encountered problems or experienced failure, but he is one who knows what he wants and in spite of all odds, goes adamantly for it. Therefore it is recommended that people should stop being afraid of failure, rather, if a person fails, the person should try and try again with added effort, such effort is most often crowned with succeed.

Furthermore, it is essential for one to be fully conscious of the importance of his target. This can motivate the individual into persevering to hit the said target.

Finally, Abraham Lincoln's journey to the American presidential seat shows the fruit of perseverance, and recommends that everyone should always persevere in the struggle for success in life.

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